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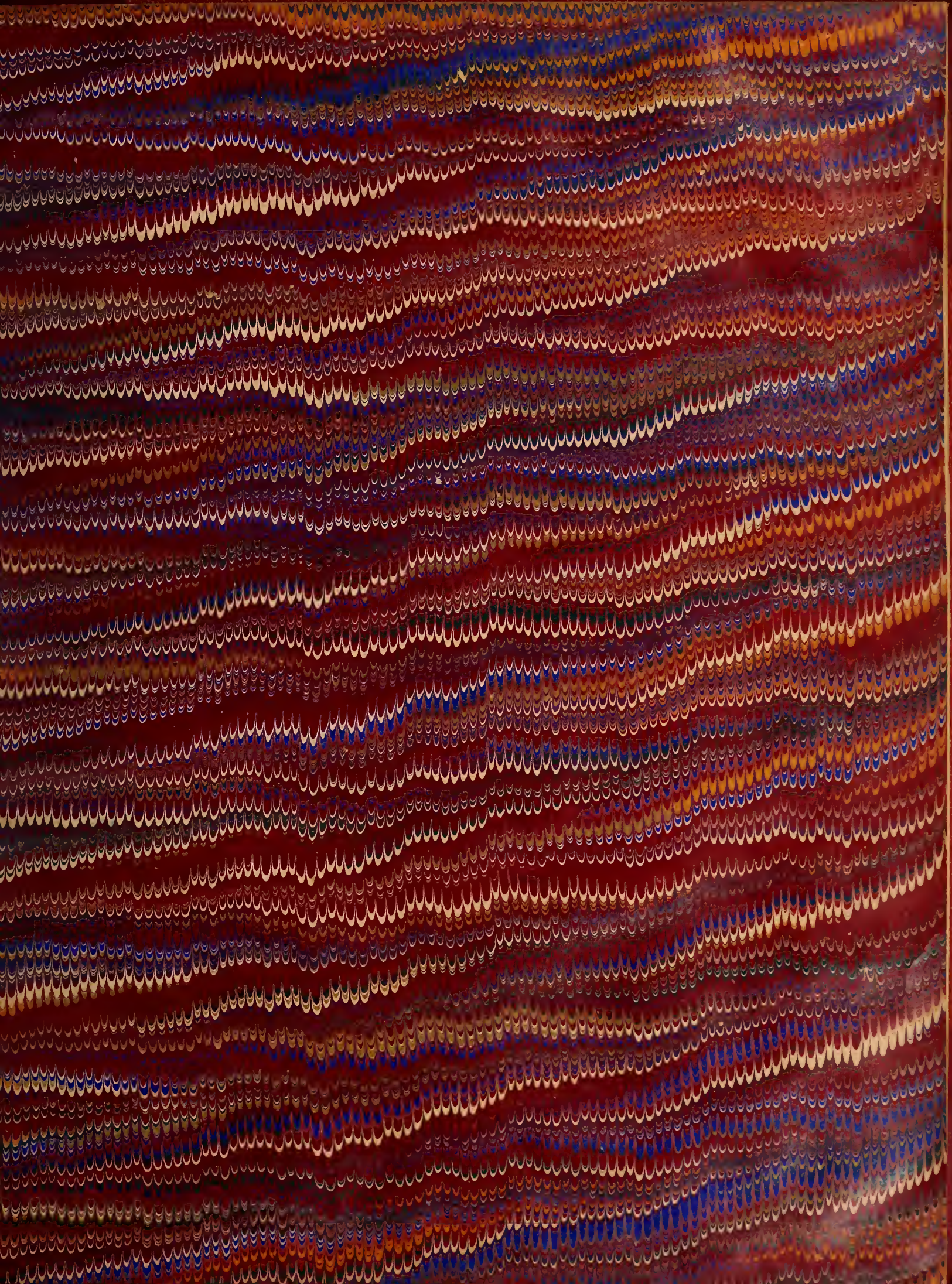
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SKETCH
OF
GEN. ROBERT McALLISTER,

BY
GEN. JOHN WATTS DEPEYSTER,

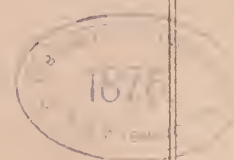
FROM
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Robert McAllister

ROBERT McALLISTER.

BY GENERAL JOHN WATTS DE PEYSTER.

WHEN the "Great Civil War" in England had terminated, indeed, with the restoration of Charles II., even the most bigoted opponents of the old Cromwellian army were compelled to admit that the best class of citizens, in every rank, position, and calling, was composed of the disbanded, God-fearing constituents of that army, with which the great Oliver had established the Commonwealth, subjected England, Scotland, and Ireland, and made his country's first popular government respected and feared, at home and abroad, by Pope, Kaiser, King, civilized or barbarian governments. In many respects the same remark would apply, and has been justly applied, to that wonderful armament which restored the integrity of these United States. But to none would it more justly apply than to the subject of this sketch, Brevet Major-General Robert McAllister, by extraction a Pennsylvanian, but whose fame in reality belongs to New Jersey. He is remarkable as one of those stern religious "disciples of duty," who are never found wanting when the firm resolution and exceptional intrepidity, founded on religious conviction, are requisite; one of those characters whose impulses vibrate, not to the factitious appeals of glory, but to the ever reliable calls of duty; and as such he is worthy to appear among the truly "representative men" of our country. To claim that he is a perfect character in the exaggerated sense of the expression would be to arrogate for him something more than human, but we do claim for him that he is a perfect type of the ideal Cromwellian officer. This is no more than justice and truth. One of his associate Brigadiers, of the same corps, in his "Three Years in the Army of the Potomac," has drawn a pen portrait of him, which justifies all the preceding remarks; and when we consider that the historian was a Frenchman, endowed with constitutional peculiarities the most opposite to the man he depicts, it becomes the more valuable, because it carries with it the assurance of its truthfulness.

McAllister, according to his companion in arms, presents a figure truly original. Ignoring the claims of family and business, he entered the service at an age which exempted him from any obligation to perform military duty. Without a single assumption of any of those peculiarities which by the vulgar are deemed inseparable from the bearing and hirsute physiognomy of a professional soldier; his face was completely shaven, and his honest features and bearing, everything about him presented an air of simplicity and modesty. His habits were those which the hastily judging world attribute to a recluse; but very far from this, they simply distinguished him as a man who has his passions under the control of reason and religion. Self-contained, his voice, which is calm and gentle, was never attuned to the diapason of an oath, or anything resembling one. Strictly a temperance man, his rigidity was for himself, his tolerance for others. His sole preaching was his example. His staff enjoyed entire liberty to use in moderation the stimulants to which he never resorted. As exact in his religious practice, as sincere in his belief, he had the Protestant service regularly celebrated, every Sunday, at his headquarters. The most agreeable attention that could be shown to him was to attend the exercises on that day, and be present at the sermon delivered by his chaplain. His habitual kindness for his soldiers never interfered with discipline. If his personal intervention was required in the infliction of punishment, he rarely failed to accompany it with an admonition, whose tenor and accent recalled to the culprit the sympathetic reproofs of his infancy and early boyhood. His soldiers looked up to him with affection as well as with obedience. The result was that when the storm of battle broke, this "father" led his children like the lioness her whelps. If McAllister was one of the most excellent of men, he was none the less the most vigorous of soldiers.

Thus far de Trobriand on his character. Viewed from the standpoint of a professional soldier, McAllister was something higher, a soldier from the self-imposed necessity of self-sacrifice, a soldier who never forgot that he was fighting in the army of the Lord, a commander who looked on his subordinates as children for whose welfare he was responsible to God. Such men are rare. In this world they seldom attain distinction, in the sense of applause, from others. They are too unselfish. The world cannot understand unselfishness. It generally repays it with ridicule in ordinary life. It is only in great emergencies where selfishness saves itself at the expense of general

ruin that these modest God-fearing men come to the front, and by the simple performance of duty compel that respect from their detractors, which in the ordinary course of affairs would only be conceded by those who knew their real worth.

Such a man pre-eminently is Robert McAllister, who might have lived and died unknown to fame, a quiet homely family man, had not a great emergency suddenly arisen, a country threatened by civil war, made in the interest of human injustice, to establish a kingdom whose corner-stone should be the denial of rights of any sort to any man whose veins contained a drop of African blood. It is hard to conjecture the amount of human misery that would have followed, in all parts of the globe, had this scheme been crowned with success. There were many times in the course of the ensuing struggle when it seemed as if God had forgotten his people, and was about to abandon the world to the dominion of injustice, but in the darkest hour the faith and courage of those few unselfish God-fearing men, of whom our hero is a living type, never failed, and they prayed on and fought on, till God's justice was vindicated, their prayers heard, their victory won.

In the numerous letters of the subject of our sketch, written to his family during the war, and describing the events in which he took part, this element of faith and prayer, courage and humility, hand in hand, is everywhere evident. There is hardly a day in which he does not record that his prayers for mercy and help went up to the throne of Grace, coupled with confessions of his own shortcomings. There is no record of personal prowess, no vaunting of his own perils. Of praise to others there is no stint. No man admires and respects the courage of others more highly, or mentions it more frequently. But after all the recital of a day's hard fighting, the plain old soldier never fails to own that he prayed heartily to God for help. He is not ashamed of his religion, but glories in it. With all this pride in being a soldier of Christ, there is not a particle of that sour vain-glory which is so apt to exist in the Puritan temperament. There is no Phariseeism in McAllister; rather an excess of kindness, overflowing in every word and deed, a very weakness of kindness, liable to be imposed on by every pitiful tale, true or untrue, that appeals to his sympathies.

As we write, the portrait of the man himself looks at us from his kind eyes, the face of a man to whom little children would come instinctively, secure of a kind word and caress, to whom distressed

people would come for counsel, beggars for help; the face of a man often imposed upon and cheated, and yet always ready to give again, a man like the dead Horace Greeley in many respects, overflowing with human kindness, while devoid of the nervous excitability which brought Greeley to his grave. There is, withal, in that face a look of strong, solid common sense which would preserve its owner from running into philanthropic excesses and crotchets, the expression of an *executive* man, able to make himself obeyed as well as loved in time of need.

And this man became a soldier, one who held his own, and made himself respected by men his very opposite in character, one whose simple manly faith in God compelled the wild and reckless soldiers who surrounded him to recognize the real superiority of the courage of duty to the courage of careless deviltry; of the courage that *never* fails to that which depends on health and strength, the applause of others, or desperation and disgust with life; a courage—the latter kind—which varies with circumstances, while the other is always the same.

Of the early life of Robert McAllister we can present no better picture than he once gave to the writer himself. When a truthful man writes his own life, we learn more of his nature than any one else can tell us. To those words we turn, resuming the narrative where his purely military history begins, commending the simple recital to our readers for its concise statement of all essential facts.

“I was born on the 1st day of June, in the year 1813, on the farm still owned by our family, situated in Lost Creek Valley, Juniata County, Pa., where my father before me was born, and the precise place on which my grandfather, Hugh McAllister, built his first cabin in the wilderness, he being the second white man that settled in that valley, about the year 1760.

“My grandfather, Hugh McAllister, was born in Lancaster County, Pa. His father came from the northern part of Ireland, about the year 1730, having emigrated thither from Scotland. My ancestors were strongly imbued with the principles of civil and religious liberty, for which they were willing to fight even unto death. My grandfather and grandmother encountered all the dangers and difficulties of a frontier life in the wilderness. They lived peaceably with the Indians when peace prevailed, and when war broke out these Indians warned them to leave, or they would be killed. My grandfather served between six and seven years in the American army, at the time of the Revolution, and at the close of our great war for Independence had attained the rank of Major. My father, Hon. William McAllister, was born on this farm, lived and died there. Out of a large family, six of us reached the years of maturity. My father's motto was, ‘work or school.’ As I was to be a farmer, I did not receive a collegiate education; only had the advantages of schools of the neighborhood. Whether we were at school or not, we generally spent our evenings in our study room, from which we learned much that we would not other-

wise have known. * * * * My brother Thompson and I spent a great deal of time together, studying military tactics, were always connected with military companies, and were both fond of drilling. Little did either of us then think that the time was coming when our swords would be drawn against each other, in a contest that threatened the destruction of our country and government. But such was the fact.

"Before the war, I was promoted from a Lienterant to a Captain, then to Lieut. Colonel, afterwards Colonel, then Brigadier-General, and had command of the Brady Brigade, of the uniformed militia of Pennsylvania.

"On the 9th day of November, 1841, I was married to Miss Ellen Jane Wilson, of Mercersburg, Pa., and resided on a part of the old homestead farm, where my two children were born, Sarah Elizabeth and Henrietta Graham.

"In the year 1848, I commenced contracting and building railroads. When the rebellion broke out, I was in New Jersey, with a heavy contract, building a tunnel and its approaches through the Oxford Hills, at Oxford, Warren County, for the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Co.

"This work was well advanced and was at this time profitable to us. When Fort Sumter was fired on, I said to my partner, 'One of us must go. We must help fight it out.' He replied, 'You are the military man of this firm; you go.' I replied, 'All right; you see to my interests here, and I will go,' and off I went to the seat of war, or rather, raised a company at Oxford, went to Trenton, was commissioned by Governor Olden a Lieut. Colonel in the 1st New Jersey regiment, and started to Washington."

Gen. McAllister's military career is in many respects a remarkable one. He was one of the very few men who went through the war from its inception to its close, being present at Bull Run and at Appomattox Court House respectively, without missing any of the pitched battles (except South Mountain and Antietam,) of the Army of the Potomac, to which he was attached from first to last.

The sole exception to this *general* presence, throwing out Pope's Campaign, and the Maryland Campaign of September, 1862, was for ninety days after Gettysburg. Two wounds received at that battle, one in the left leg and the other in the right foot, sent him home a temporary cripple, whereby he missed the minor engagements during Meade's retreat in the fall of 1863, but before the Mine Run campaign, he was back again in the field, the same reliable old soldier, put in wherever hard knocks were required to be given and taken.

Indeed, before he had entirely recovered from his Gettysburg wounds, he returned to the army of the Potomac, then at Culpepper Court House, and took command of the 1st Brigade, 2nd Division, 3rd Corps. With it he advanced to Pony Mountain, on that reconnaissance which discovered that the enemy were moving eastward toward Centreville. Thereupon commenced Meade's retreat, which

has often been styled "the Race," and is qualified by one of the permanent writers upon the war—in irony, perhaps—"a campaign of manœuvres."

At the battle of Bull Run he appears in the same character which he always preserved, steady, modest and fearless, and inspiring others by his example to do their duty with the same serenity as himself. He shall tell the story in his own words, while we incidentally remark that the old saying about "truth being stranger than fiction" was never better exemplified than in the discrepancy between the quiet, homely New Jersey colonel, and the brilliant war correspondent of the *London Times* in their respective accounts of a similar transaction.

Lieut. Col. McAllister, commanding 1st New Jersey Volunteers, in a letter written at the time, says:

"The whole scene beggars all description; and yet, strange to say, our officers and men, raw as they were, remained cool and collected, and marched through these retreating columns with a firmness which astonished all who saw the regiments, and which has since been a theme of universal praise. * * *

"A civilian, with a broad-rimmed hat, his face pale as death, came riding down the road at a furious rate. I ordered him to halt. He, very much agitated and frightened, said, 'I am a civilian, and must pass on.' 'No, you can't pass,' said I; 'my orders are to stop everybody.' He then said, 'I am a bearer of dispatches to Washington, and it is imperative that I should go on.' 'You cannot pass until this panic is stopped; every one who passes helps to increase the stampede,' was my answer. 'Here are my papers,—look at them,' at the same time pulling them out of his pocket. I replied, 'No time to examine papers now. Wait till we are through with this job and we will consider your case.' He again implored me in pitiful tones to let him through, whereupon I said, 'There is my commander; go to him,' at the same time indicating Colonel Montgomery. He went to the Colonel, had some conversation with him, when Montgomery, disgusted with the man's cowardice, raising himself in his saddle, called at the top of his voice, 'Let that man go!' I did so, when the stranger put spurs to his horse, and made the very stones of the pike fly behind him. That man was no other than Russell, the correspondent of the *London Times*.

"In contrast with this gallant Englishman, I saw a lady on my left, sitting in a buggy, amid the throng of soldiers, civilians, horses, mules, wagons, ambulances, right side up and wrong side up, quite calm and unconcerned. The Colonel enquired, 'Madam, are you not afraid?' To which she replied, 'No, Colonel, I feel perfectly safe.'"

We presume that the reader requires no particular comment on the above little narrative. It ought to have been printed as a note at the end of Mr. Russell's famous "Bull Run Letter."

"I think General Montgomery, then Colonel Montgomery—writes Major-General, then Lieutenant-Colonel Robert McAllister—should

have the credit of stopping the stampede at Bull Run. He started for the battle-field with two regiments as Brigade commander. One regiment left the field at Centreville, without orders, leaving the 1st New Jersey alone, as you are aware. The last conversation I had with the lamented General Kearny, he said that Montgomery never received the praise he deserved for what he had done on that occasion. Our firm stand there prevented the rebels following.

"I held the conversation mentioned with Russell myself."

The conduct of General McAllister demonstrates one fact, that there was plenty of the true military stuff in our army from the beginning of the war, if there had only been some one at the head who knew how to use it to advantage. There were plenty of regiments like his own, which, with a Desaix's inspiration to lead them, could have made the first Bull Run another Marengo. Even the ensuing night a Bernard of Lutzen, a Rohan of Rhinefelden, or even a Santa Anna of the Mexican War of Liberation, who had the common sense to appreciate the effect of an attack from a body of fresh troops even on a victorious army whose nerve-forces had been exhausted in the achievement of their success, could have wrested victory from defeat. Joseph E. Johnston had the magnanimity to acknowledge that the presence and firm attitude of the Union reserve on the heights of Centreville restrained any attempt at pursuit. McAllister's regiment remained on the field all night, within cannon shot of the rebels, and only withdrew next morning when dawn revealed its unsupported condition.

The 1st New Jersey had next the honor to head the audacious advance of Kearny's Brigade upon Manassas Junction, a few months later. Did space permit, we would dwell upon the graphic account, by McAllister himself, of this movement, in which the single New Jersey Brigade, by a mingling of audacity and wariness not often paralleled, imposed upon a whole army of the enemy, and occupied a position some ten miles in advance of the Union forces, frightening the enemy to a precipitate retreat from his entrenchments at Manassas Junction, with the loss of a considerable quantity of camp equipage and seven flags. The 1st New Jersey, the last to leave the field at Centreville, in 1861, was the first to advance on the enemy, in 1862, and McAllister commanded it on both occasions.

We must be content with a rapid summary of the three years that followed, our space being limited. During that time, McAllister was transferred from the 1st New Jersey to the Colonelcy of the 11th

New Jersey, thence, as ranking Colonel to the command of the First Brigade, Second Division, Third Corps, to which his regiment was attached.

On the Peninsula it was not in the aggressive alone that McAllister displayed his soldierly capacity; it was amid the gloom of reverse that his pertinacity revealed the instinctive soldier. At Gaines' Mills, as Lieut.-Colonel commanding 1st New Jersey Volunteers, he made a splendid fight for a regiment, and as such it was considered at the time. So it was throughout the Seven Days' Fight. If there was flinching elsewhere, it was not in the ranks under his orders.

On the 30th of June, 1862, McAllister was commissioned Colonel of the 11th New Jersey Volunteers, and was attached to the 1st Brigade,* 2d Division, 3d Corps. It is known that the 3d Corps was so fought to pieces in the Pope campaign, that the fall of 1862 witnessed an enforced resting spell for its recuperation, although it did good service in guarding all that was of importance in the direction in which Pope fought.

The next time this brave officer was in action was at Fredericksburg, 1st, and though the corps to which he belonged was not under severe fire, it occupied a very exposed position, better calculated to try the discipline of troops than another which the inexperienced might consider one more likely to put these qualities to the highest test.

At Chancellorsville, however, McAllister came out in all the steady light of those qualities which make him a "representative man." Never was a regiment more exposed than his own 11th New Jersey. At one time it was all alone in the midst of the enemy, so that it had to show double front, give and receive fire front and rear. So completely was it isolated that it was given up for lost, and had to blast its way back through obstacles as desperate as those through which the mythical hero of Bulwer's "Coming Race" effected his return to the upper world.

At Gettysburg, where McAllister was wounded in the left leg with a minie ball, and in the right foot with a fragment of a shell, it

* This Brigade, originally Kearny's, was not THE 1st New Jersey, which so distinguished itself and suffered so terribly at Bull Run 2d; which Stonewall Jackson said "was the finest body of troops he ever saw." Brigadier-Gen. George W. Taylor was mortally wounded, 27th August, 1862, and died on the same day that General Kearny was killed, the 1st September following. Colonel McAllister at this time was with the 11th New Jersey, at Fort Marcy, ready to defend that point if the enemy approached us. A few days afterwards, he was assigned to the 1st Brigade, 2d Division, 3d Corps, and remained there, and advanced on Fredericksburg.

is almost sufficient to say of the division to which he belonged that it was fought and handled by Major-Gen. A. A. Humphreys, now chief of Engineers, U. S. A., to indicate the bloody work in which it took part.

In the minor operations between the crowning battle in Pennsylvania and the Mine Run fiasco, McAllister was not engaged. Although slightly wounded on other occasions, and more or less affected by sickness, this was the only period of the war—ninety days—when he was not actively engaged at the front. At Locust Grove (as sometimes called), or Mine Run, his command made a good fight, having previously behaved very well at Jacob's Ford, on the Rappahannock, where he was the first man to land under the fire of the enemy; also at the crossing at Kelly's Ford.

In the Wilderness, second day, McAllister was wonderful. Here he had two horses shot under him. Had he been invested with some of the deceptive halo which seems requisite to attract the attention of an unreflecting populace he would have shared with others the applause accorded to what the French call *chic*, that outside lacquer which often conceals base metal, or that enamel which overlays a richer metal.

At the Spotsylvania "death-angle" he acted the same heroic part as at Chancellorsville and the first Bull Run, and throughout the slaughter which again compelled the consolidation of the old 3d Corps, "as *we* understand it." In all the ensuing battles of summer and autumn, he continued to merit the admiration and highest praise not only of his superiors, of such men as the "superb" Hancock, of the consummate "pure gold" Humphreys, but also of inferiors, likewise of very many to whom the figure and not the individual was known. It required the desperate position of the Boydton Plank-Road to bring out McAllister in his true proportions and compel the universal acknowledgement of the sterling metal of the man and soldier. Cut off and surrounded by the best troops of the Confederacy, with a brigade to which 700 raw recruits had just been added, green soldiers who had never fired a shot in action, he faced by the rear rank, made light shine through the encompassing enemy, and relieved and saved the division he was sent to support. Now it was that his light could no longer be kept under a bushel, and from this moment McAllister's virtues received due acknowledgement, if not commensurate reward. In the picket line fight, 5th November, 1864; at Hatcher's Run, 5th February, 1865; and again at the Boydton Plank-Road, in

capturing the enemy's picket line and storming their works, 2d April, 1865, he not only conquered the national enemies, but his own. These were all victories which compelled honor and praise, which were freely bestowed by all. McAllister shone in the times when a soldier is best developed. The dark hours of reverse and defeat were to him the crucibles which demonstrated the purity of his metal by the test of fire; the dark hours when danger braved is but little known or appreciated, and gallantry displayed scarcely receives acknowledgment or record. It was in the gloomy days of Grant's campaign from the Rapid Anna, amid stifling heat, intense labor, underestimated privations, ceaseless fighting and constant exposure, that McAllister did the most, braved the most, suffered the most. How much he suffered and exposed himself no general sketch can make a reader appreciate; generally with the responsibility of a Brigadier, sometimes owing to the melting away and consolidation of brigades as a regimental commander, as for instance just after Spottsylvania, and too often as neither one nor the other, with the responsibility of both. When the writer recurs to this brave man's career, he cannot refrain from repeating to the reader the sad words wrung from the old soldier by the remembrance of desperate service without proper acknowledgment at the time when it might have availed. "Often have I, then and there, led forlorn hopes. As you know, I never sent them, but I went with them, not to victory, but to certain defeat!"

Colonel McAllister was brevetted Brigadier-General for his glorious behavior at the first "Bull Pen," as the soldiers styled the tremendous fight on Boydton Plank-Road, 27th October, 1864, and Major-General for meritorious conduct throughout the war.

Two months from the date of the Appomattox surrender, he was home in New Jersey, and his own history closes with the simple statement, copied from a letter, and given in his own words:

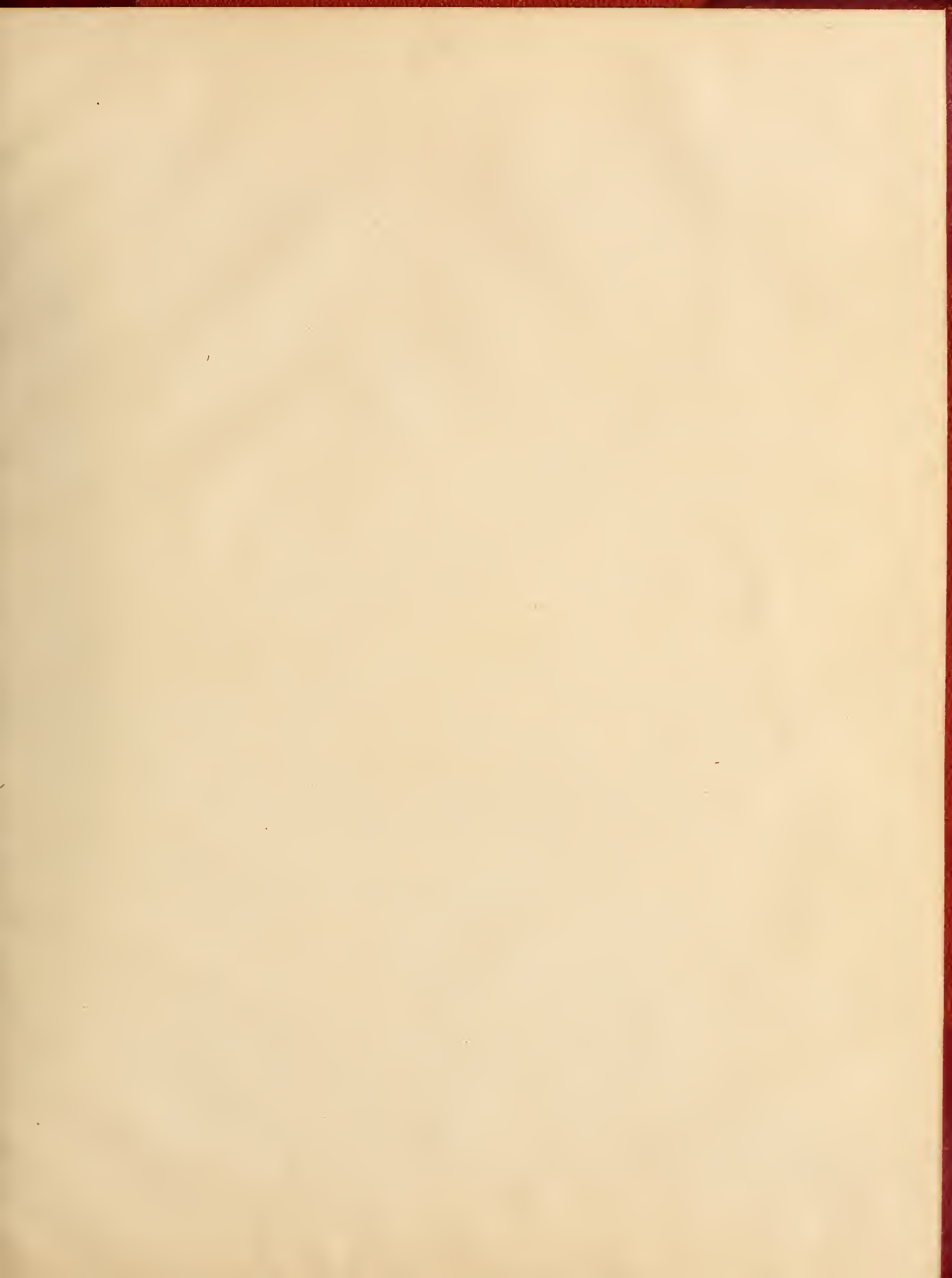
"Since the war, I have been engaged as General Manager of the Ironton Railroad Company, in mining and shipping ore to the furnaces in Lehigh Valley, and I reside here, in Allentown, Pa."

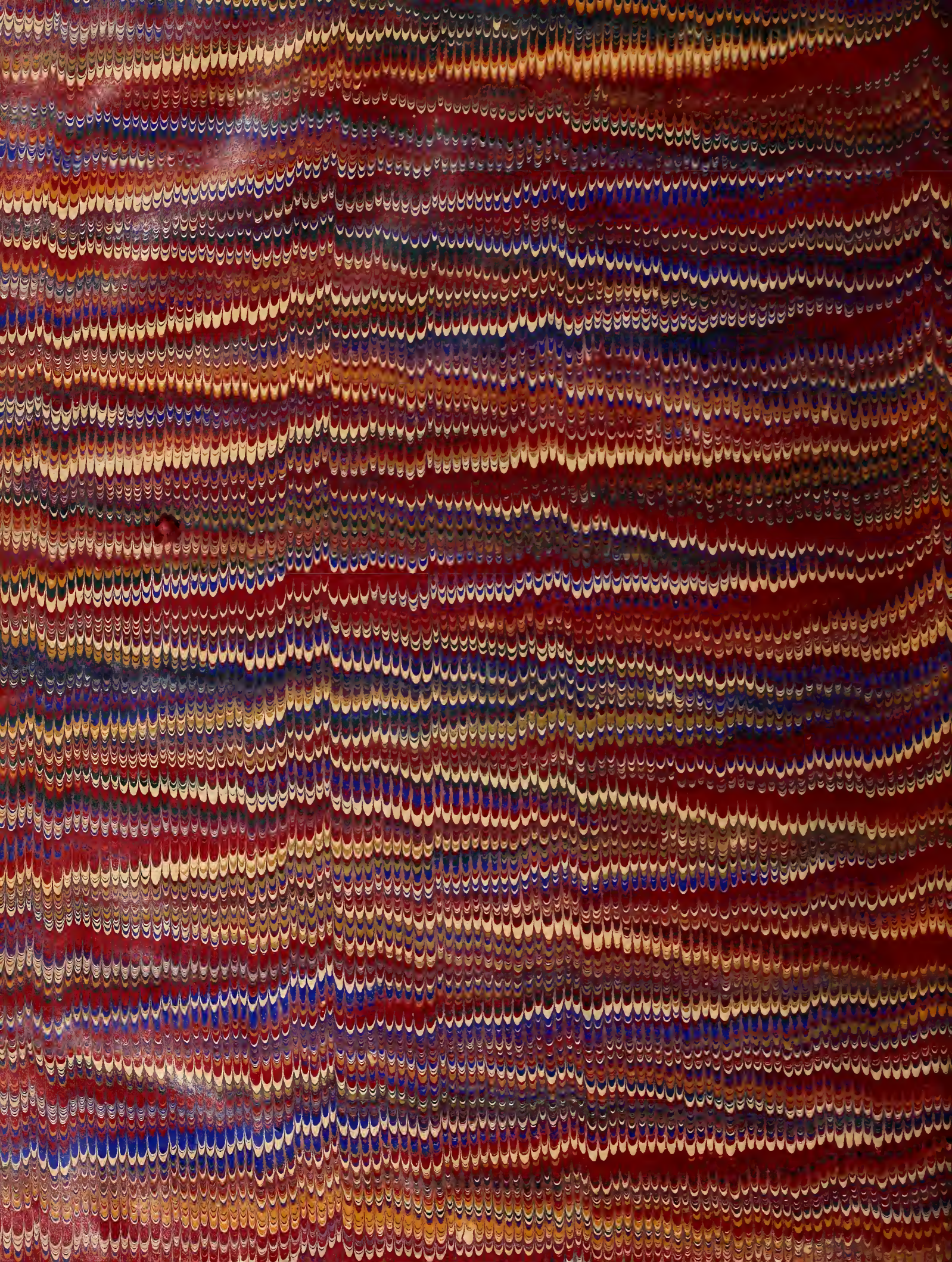
The old Cromwellian spirit makes him now only remarkable for being a quiet, industrious, law-abiding citizen. God send us many such.

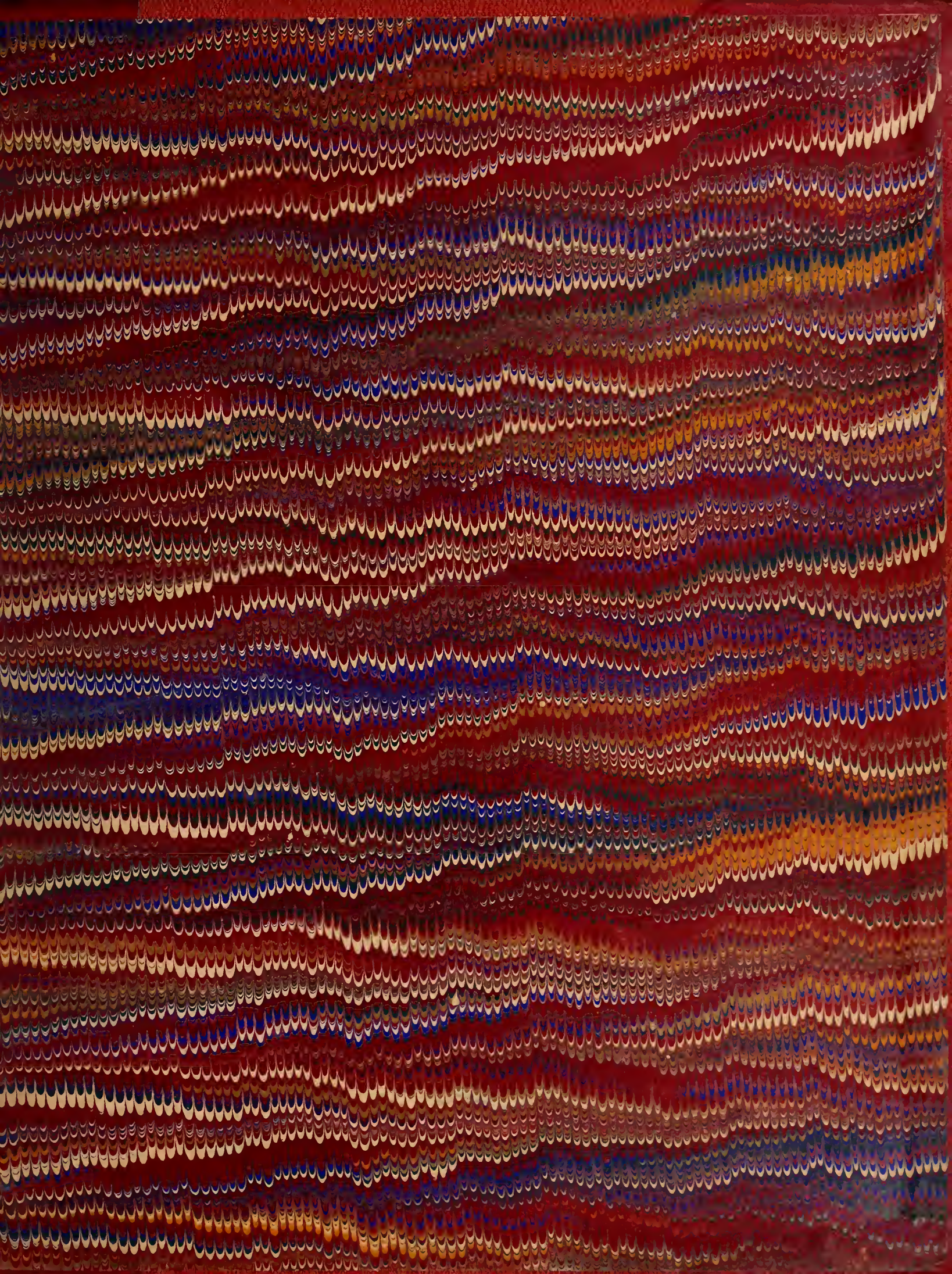












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